

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Warrnambool—Thursday, 21 November 2019

MEMBERS

Mr Darren Cheeseman—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

WITNESS

Mr Robert Gibson, Manager Environment and Regulatory Services, Moyne Shire Council.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing. I just want to run through some important formalities before we begin. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that no legal action can be taken against you in relation to the evidence you give. However, this protection does not apply to comments made outside of the hearing, even if you are restating what you have said during the hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of the evidence in the next week or so for you to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the Committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you for making the time to meet with Committee today. Could you please state your name and your title before beginning your presentation.

Mr GIBSON: Certainly. My name is Robert Gibson. I am the Manager of Environment and Regulatory Services at Moyne shire.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Robert. Over to you.

Mr GIBSON: Thank you very much. I will start off by saying thank you very much to the Committee for taking the time to come down and hear from Moyne shire today. It is certainly appreciated that it takes a lot of time and effort to come down here and give us the opportunity to put a few words to you, and hopefully give you something to think about as you move forward with your Inquiry.

Just by way of context, as was just stated outside the hearing, Moyne shire is very large. It is a largely agricultural community. It is not a large population in the broader sense of things. So climate change is going to have a range of effects on the varying communities throughout Moyne shire, given we have got everything from coastal to inland communities and different business operations going on in that space. I suppose the focus of my submission today will be on the coastal elements, but in doing so I do not want to totally have the Committee ignore the fact that it will have broader implications. I will just touch on those, but I will not go into any detail.

In terms of the coast, it has been a hotspot issue for Moyne shire for quite a period of time now, certainly predating my commencement with the council back in 2013. For the most part of that the focus has been on Port Fairy, primarily because of the impact coastal erosion and inundation are having on the town and also the significance of the town as an economic driver and a social hub for the municipality but also the state of Victoria. By way of putting that in context, Port Fairy is recognised as a premier tourism and visitor destination nationally and internationally. It gets promoted around the traps as being in the top 10 places to visit when you come to Australia.

The CHAIR: Can you just put on the record its current population, the current number of dwellings and its summer population. I know we kind of mentioned it a bit earlier.

Mr GIBSON: Yes. I do not have the numbers in front of me, but the population of Port Fairy would be in the order of 3000 and the dwellings are 1000-ish, let us say, in nice round figures. And your other question, sorry?

The CHAIR: Its summer population.

Mr GIBSON: It probably expands to somewhere in the order of 10 000 to 12 000 people over summer, so there is quite an influx. While the summer influx is notable, it is becoming more and more a year-round destination. The self-drive-type visitors will come and pass through, spend a night or two and then move on. So what was possibly in times gone past a bit of a winter lull—and it still is to some extent—there is a consistency of visitation to the town all year round now. That is probably further encouraged or supported by the number of events that are held in Port Fairy over the winter months. They have winter weekends that encourage people to come down and actually embrace the cold and wet and enjoy it for what it is too—so not just the summer.

In terms of some overarching council approaches to climate change, similar to the previous presentation, Moyne shire was involved in what was roughly a six-year project of the Climate Resilient Communities of the Barwon South West. Probably the principal outcome of that project was the development of a climate adaptation plan for the council. The main focus of that plan is about embedding the whole concept of climate change into council functions so that as decision-makers are going about their business they are actually pausing for a moment to go, 'What are the climate change implications of this building I'm about to build or the road I'm going to build'. So that is the overarching objective of that particular plan.

Some years ago—2013—Moyne shire completed its local coastal hazard assessment. It was one of four pilot local coastal hazard assessments that were conducted in Victoria at that time. That document provided very clear evidence around what the rate of sea level rise would be over time and how that would then impact on the coast from both an inundation perspective and a coastal erosion perspective. That produced the maps that show in round figures by 2050 this is the area of land you might expect to be inundated at certain times, by 2100 this is the area of land you might expect to be inundated at certain times—and similarly for the erosion.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask a question on that. I think at the time that work was done the Victorian Government had a target of 90 centimetres by 2100. I think the IPCC is now saying it is more likely to be 1.2. Will the council be initiating a review of that work to reflect the new science that has emerged over the last six months or so?

Mr GIBSON: Not specifically. That document worked to a 1-metre sea level rise by 2100, so it is still in the ballpark of projections. But if modern commentary is anything to go by, it is probably going to be at the lower end still, certainly not at the higher end. Subsequent to that document, council also undertook a Port Fairy Coastal and Structure Planning Project, which also worked into anticipated or projected sea level rise and storm events and combined those two. If they should happen concurrently, what would be the impacts on land in and around Port Fairy. That work has only been completed in, say, the last 18 months to two years, so that is very current.

Ms GREEN: So would you move on and do Peterborough as well, for example?

Mr GIBSON: Peterborough, like Killarney—

Ms GREEN: Yes, but there are more people at Peterborough.

Mr GIBSON: so there are other areas in the shire that are going to need to be looked at at some point in time, and hopefully I do not overlook this as I move through my presentation. But the whole prospect of climate change is happening now, the impacts are being felt now and the worse it gets over time it is going to have a greater impact, but those impacts are not being felt now. I suppose the point I want to make is we actually have an opportunity to start—we do not have to do everything at once. We can start doing things with a bit of a planned risk-based approach that allows us to deal with the critical issues now and then gradually address those that are going to become an issue over time. There is low-lying land in and around Killarney that, should those dunes ever breach, may be susceptible to inundation. We are cognisant of it; we just have not got to that yet. That is something for a point in time, but it is certainly something we are not unaware of. Where was I?

The CHAIR: Keep going.

Ms GREEN: Sorry, Robert, for distracting you.

The CHAIR: Whilst you are thinking, we might just pull back to Port Fairy. The work you have undertaken has obviously clearly identified some privately owned land, I assume, along with publicly owned land that is going to be subjected to inundation?

Mr GIBSON: Yes.

The CHAIR: How has the community reacted to that? How has the council engaged with the community on that? Obviously people would find that quite—

Mr GIBSON: Confronting.

The CHAIR: confronting to know that their property is in harm's way. How have you dealt with that and what measures are you putting in place to make sure that planning permits do not get granted for properties that you know are going to be in harm's way over the next—

Mr GIBSON: Period of time

The CHAIR: period of time.

Mr GIBSON: Really good questions. I have got to go back to the first part of it. Prior to my role, so prior to 2013, the local coastal hazard assessment project had been well underway and the council, with support from the State Government, conducted a really extensive community engagement program. One of the things they did was ask people to bring in photos of East Beach, because people have long family connections with East Beach in particular, so they brought in photos of when they were there in 1952 or 1963. What it actually did was bring to the forefront of the minds of those people—we all have a memory of what things are and what they were—‘Oh, look what it was like 40 years ago. It has changed. This is happening. I can't deny that that's happening’. It was a process that helped bring it, I suppose, to a reality that, ‘Oh, yes, this is happening’, so when they get told that it is happening it is not really a surprise; they have come to that conclusion by their own means. That was, I think, in hindsight a really good proactive approach to bringing people on the journey nice and early.

Subsequent to that, the report was released—I will get to this one—the coastal climate change adaptation plan, so a bit more detail on the coastal issues confronting Port Fairy, about how the council wants to proceed with addressing those challenges. All through the development of that plan we had open houses where people could come along, talk to coastal engineers, talk to council officers and look at maps and talk through whatever their concerns might be in a relaxed environment. So not the old town hall meeting where it can be a bit adversarial at times.

The CHAIR: Them and us.

Mr GIBSON: ‘Let's just have a chat and we can work through it with you on a personal level’. So I think those approaches have been beneficial. I think as a rule the community is comfortable with the reality, in that they are not denying it or telling us we have got the facts wrong, and also is appreciative of the fact that the council is trying to do something about it. The rock wall on East Beach is probably the most obvious example of that. So back in 2012 there was some significant erosion on East Beach, and one of the houses towards the northern end of the beach, the dunes were starting to get a bit close to its back fence or front fence, depending on how you want to orientate. There was a section of rock wall that was upgraded at that end of the beach to provide protection to that home or the houses along that section of beach, again to 2100, with projected sea level rises forecast into that. The wall has also been designed that it can be built on in the future if needs be. So you would not have to start again. You would just get more rock, and it is designed to build on.

The CHAIR: What was the cost of the construction of that?

Mr GIBSON: Look, the rule of thumb around the construction of our upgraded seawalls is about \$2000 a linear metre. So we have 2 kilometres of beach; it is a \$4 million job in round figures. That is quite challenging for a municipality of our size. It is a lot of money to find. Up until now the State Government has been very supportive of providing funds to help pay for that. We have had a cost-share arrangement that has enabled us to construct almost 600 metres of seawall. In actual fact—I do not know if you would like to distribute those amongst yourselves; it might just help give us something to talk to—I think there is a picture just at the top of page 10 of a pile of rocks. That is essentially the rock wall—one of the varying states of the rock wall—that was established sometime around the 1950s. So really not a constructed wall; it pretty much looks to me like they have backed the truck up to it and put some rocks there to defend the toe of the dune.

Ms GREEN: A bit like Dutton Way, but not as bad.

Mr HAMER: Just for orientation, you were mentioning East Beach. So in the front of that entire section is East Beach. Is that right?

Mr GIBSON: That is what we call East Beach, and the part we are most interested in at this point in time—

Ms GREEN: It is a fabulous beach.

Mr GIBSON: is where the houses are. So you can see where the houses are.

Mr HAMER: That they directly back onto.

Mr GIBSON: That is the 2-kilometre length of beach.

The CHAIR: I mean, I do not know if this is high tide or low tide, but there is not much of a beach, is there?

Mr GIBSON: No. I can take you back one page to page 9, and you can have a look at East Beach most days during the winter, high or low tide. There is no beach there for anyone to enjoy.

Mr FOWLES: Have you done any insurance modelling around this precinct? I mean, some of these houses look as though they are going to end up in the drink.

Mr GIBSON: Going back to the local coastal hazard assessment, what it said was with that rock wall that we are looking at, at the top of page 10, under current sea level conditions that wall is vulnerable to overtopping and undermining and failure, which would then lead to erosion of the dunes it is supposedly protecting. Therefore the wall needs to be upgraded to ideally the 2100 standard. And I think right inside the back cover, at page 13, there are a couple of photos of what the upgraded wall looks like.

The CHAIR: So if I was one of those property owners along there and I had an old house that I decided that I wanted to knock over and rebuild a newer home, would council grant that permit today for me to do that?

Mr GIBSON: It would be subject to a coastal assessment and some evidence that they have got a way of protecting the house from coastal erosion. It is a consideration in the planning scheme. Obviously there are challenges with all the other houses there kind of setting a precedent. It does make it difficult. But it does provide that consideration in the planning scheme, that it be considered how they are going to do it.

The CHAIR: Most people, when they would undertake an activity like that or wish to buy a property, would obviously need a mortgage. Have there been any moves by the bank or banks broadly, in terms of themselves and their own due diligence, requesting information around coastal inundation and what risks might be associated with that property?

Mr GIBSON: Not to my knowledge.

The CHAIR: Not yet?

Mr GIBSON: But I do know that the insurance sector has really good data and information around all this sort of stuff, so they may not be coming to us but there may be other sources of information that they are relying on that would be outside my scope.

The CHAIR: That is all right.

Mr MORRIS: Robert, where are you at in terms of the process? You have got, say, 800 metres?

Mr GIBSON: Six hundred is done of the 2000 metres, and as I was saying, the State Government has been helpful up to this point through their coastal infrastructure upgrade program to help us fund these rock walls, but this year that funding program and also the Coastal Public Access and Risk grants have been discontinued. These have been critical to the work that we have been doing and we had planned to do. Just last year we constructed a significant length of wall right in front of the main section of East Beach and as part of those grant schemes provided an all-abilities DDA-compliant access point that enables anyone to get down onto East Beach and enjoy it safely, and also reorientated the ramp that goes into the surf club. Previously it pointed straight off into the sea, so in stormy weather the waves would actually wash into the base of the surf club, so we have reorientated the ramp to avoid that recurring. So there has been some really good work done and there is more to do, but I suppose there is a little bit of disappointment and frustration that that funding source has been discontinued, and at this point we are still not sure why that happened.

Another example of where particularly the access grants are important, Griffiths Island sits just near the mouth of the Moyne River. It has the lighthouse on it. Any day of the week there will be numerous people taking a walk around the island. It is possibly the most visited—

Ms GREEN: Mutton birds, shearwaters.

Mr GIBSON: Oh, yes, the whole works, so it is a focal point of our tourism offerings, and locals enjoy it as well. The causeway that leads out to that, the culverts under it are failing, so the ability to get vehicles out there for emergencies or for maintenance is depleted and at some point it will be unsafe for people to walk across, at some point in time. We had planned to try and access that grants scheme this year to get that fixed up so it would be safe and usable in the future, but it is gone and now we do not know how we are going to deal with that.

That probably brings me to one of my key points for the day, and that is, I suppose—and it was kind of alluded to in the previous presentation—about how the coast does not stop at a municipal boundary or indeed a state boundary. The difficulty that we had when the funding was available to us was the lottery that was involved in accessing those funds. You would put an application in; some years you would get a bit, some years you would get nothing, some years you would not get what you had hoped for, and then that makes it difficult to deliver. One year we got \$75 000, and that barely pays for the mobilisation and the purchase of the rock. How do you actually build any wall? It is not worth spending that to build 10 metres of wall—you have lost your economy of scale. So that is the importance of dealing with things on a strategic level and finding the economy of scale to make things worthwhile and having the certainty around when things can be rolled out.

If I was to take a slightly bigger picture view of the world I would say what some of the obvious ones are in Victoria: you have got Inverloch, which is eroding at a rate of knots; you have got Dutton Way in Portland; you have got Port Fairy; and there are problems in Apollo Bay. Notwithstanding the inherent challenges that the political cycle provides in this situation, the opportunity is there to have a—like I said, we do not have to solve the problems overnight—20-year program that says, ‘Inverloch, you’re in dire straits, so we’ll give you \$2 million this year. Port Fairy, you’ll get half a million for your rock wall in 2023–24 and we’ll come back and give you another half a million in 27–28’. We can work with that, because we know we just have to do some maintenance or whatever to hold the fort until the proper solution comes along in due course. That level of certainty and, I suppose, ability to plan it out not just spatially but temporally—space and time—just helps everyone. You are not left wondering, ‘How are we going to deal with this?’ and ‘When’s our number going to come up to get the money, if it ever does?’.

The CHAIR: In terms of that, the coastline is managed by a number of different entities. Sometimes it is local government, sometimes it is Parks Victoria, sometimes it is the department itself, sometimes it is various committees of management. In terms of your coastline, it is obviously quite a significantly long one. Do you think it would make more public sense if there was more clarification around who is the coastal manager, who has what responsibility for managing the coastline, for doing the strategic planning, for seeking the funding to maintain the coast and to restore it? I am sure you have good relationships, but we have heard some evidence that it is a bit messy. I am just interested in your perspective.

Mr GIBSON: Yes, definitely it would help. Like you say, there are a lot of players and it can get confusing. We are not too bad for the most part because it is us with basically a little 800-metre strip at Killarney and principally the township of Port Fairy and a little bit of land at Peterborough, not like Warrnambool were describing—stop-start, stop-start, stop-start. We do not have that so much. There is a section of beach just to the north of Port Fairy as you continue on further towards the golf course that is unreserved Crown land, so that would effectively be DELWP, and then you get back into Parks Victoria-managed land and it goes on from there. We would probably digress from the climate change component, but that bit of DELWP land in between the Parks and the council land does create some difficulty and frustration within the community as to who is managing that part and who is looking after the hooded plovers there and taking action to try and protect them from being trodden on or from dogs walking all over or chasing the birds. So from that perspective—

Mr MORRIS: Is there any reason historically why the department has kept that and why it has not been transferred to Parks?

Mr GIBSON: I do not know. I think it is just history and the way things were carved up and done in the past. I am not aware why. I cannot answer. It just is.

The CHAIR: Just is—that is often the case, isn't it?

Mr GIBSON: Yes.

Mr MORRIS: Just going back to the project, it came up as a \$10.8 million project. That is a pretty big project, knowing a little bit about these projects myself with the beach which was starting to disappear into the sea at Mount Martha North.

Mr GIBSON: Yes.

Mr MORRIS: Obviously there are components, but in terms of that funding certainly you were talking about, it is probably too big a project to say, 'All right, we're going to fund this in 2023–24'. I do not imagine the council would want to take it on in a calendar year, but would you perhaps break it into rock wall, beach renourishment, whatever?

Mr GIBSON: You can break it down more than that. Take the rock wall; I do not think we could physically build 1.5 kilometres of rock wall in one financial year—

Mr MORRIS: Big project.

Mr GIBSON: because there are other constraints around that. We have got tourists coming to the beach all over the summer. You cannot do it during school holidays, you cannot do it during the—

The CHAIR: Stormier parts of the year.

Mr GIBSON: stormier times of year because you have got no beach to work on. So we actually only have a narrow window of opportunity to do the works, which has typically been that October–November time frame. So we do not necessarily want to get the whole lot in one hit, but what would be ideal is you go, 'We'll give you enough to do 400 metres of work in 2021 and we'll come back and do some work in Dutton Way in 2022–23, and then we'll come back and give you another half a million in 2024–25'. It can actually be broken down into components, as you are suggesting, whether it is the rock wall or the tips or South Beach. Beyond that it can be further broken down. It is the surety of knowing that we are locked in to get some money at some point in time that is probably more important. But your point is valid; we would not want the whole thing in one hit, and nor can you probably justify throwing \$10 million at one municipality and everyone else gets nothing. It needs to be shared around in a manageable fashion.

The CHAIR: I think there has to be also a bit of an assessment—and I am interested in your perspective on this—of what is defensible and reasonable public investment to defend private property. What can be defended, and what is ultimately a futile exercise? What is your perspective around that?

Mr GIBSON: So what can be is—without that you sort of do not pass go—we have demonstrated that Port Fairy is defensible, at least until 2100 and potentially a bit beyond that if you wanted to upgrade the wall further. We are looking well beyond most of the lifetimes in this room, I suspect, when we get beyond that. I think what became evident to me was that every year I give a presentation to some Melbourne University students who come to East Beach and we explain what is occurring there, why it is occurring and the history that has led to some of these things, and what became evident to me was that these are all 20-, 21- and 22-year-olds, a whole new generation of people who have grown up with climate change. This is not a debatable thing for them; it is just a fact of life that they are already cognisant of. And they stand there and go, 'Well, these houses are going to wash into the ocean', and that may be the case in a period of time in the future. But what defending now does to significant community assets—whether that be a private home, which is part of the community of Port Fairy—is that it provides the time for communities, individuals and families to adjust to what the new paradigm might be in 80 or 100 years time. So it provides for the generational shift in thinking and in attitudes, and financially and economically for the community to readjust. If you were just to say today, 'The policy is retreat', that is just not going to fly. It is not going to fly politically and it is not going to fly economically. It is a difficult one to sell, and for a good reason. Whereas investing in something like the rock

wall on East Beach, which has an 80- to 100-year life span, which is not an unreasonable life span for most public infrastructure in this day and age, you are buying the time for further adjustments at all levels over time. So I think it is actually really important for us to act now to provide the transition period that we need to go through over the next 50, 100 or 150 years.

Ms GREEN: Thanks for your presentation, Robert. Two things. The night soil site, in particular, I am pretty gobsmacked about that. What support, what approach or what alarms in a sense are you getting around that from Wannan Water? What are they saying? Because I would have thought that—

Mr GIBSON: Wannan Water? Nothing. It does not really impact their assets or their provision of services. The groundwater gets tested regularly, and there are no concerns from the groundwater contamination perspective.

Ms GREEN: So it is not near an outfall?

Mr GIBSON: No. What the real challenge is, as was experienced back in 2014 and again in 2015, is the dune eroding to the point where the rubbish in those landfills is exposed and drops onto the beach. When that did last happen the political fallout from that was considerable.

Ms GREEN: Sorry, what year was that?

Mr GIBSON: It was 2014 and I think again in 2015, a little bit in 2015. So we constructed a basic rock wall, if you like, in front of the Moyne shire tip site. That was built in about May 2014, and in June 2014 we had a big storm on the south-west coast here which did a lot of damage across the board, but the tip stood solid. So that rock wall was assessed later as having done its job in protecting what would have no question exposed the rubbish in that dune. As a consequence of that, we then moved to lengthen the wall and to upgrade it a little bit to make it a bit more reliable. And as luck would have it, the weekend that the excavators were mobilising we had another little event and some rubbish was again spilt onto the beach. That generated national attention. You know, there were people writing letters to the Prime Minister over that one. So it is a concern for a lot of people. In terms of assistance from the Government, with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning we have been provided with \$1.5 million to do some assessments on what it will take to get rubbish out of the tip. A lot of it is all hypotheticals about what it might cost and what is there, because you cannot really actually see what is under the ground. So part of that—

Mr FOWLES: So is the nightsoil site next to the tip or is it—

Mr GIBSON: It is a few hundred metres down the road, a bit closer to Port Fairy.

Mr FOWLES: It is a bit further down. And why is it contaminated with stuff like asbestos? Was it not just an excreta thing?

Mr GIBSON: It operated in the 1970s, 80s and 90s.

Mr FOWLES: Okay. And it is State Government-owned, but the State Government has not done the work to contain this material getting into the—

Mr GIBSON: Right, so we will talk about the nightsoil site for a second.

Ms GREEN: Yes.

Mr GIBSON: So that was closed off probably about the time Port Fairy was sewerred, because it was, as you say, a nightsoil site. Then all the old cans and whatever, that just all got piled in and buried at that point in time. So there is glass, cans, rust and all sorts of horrors in there that you would not want bare feet on.

The CHAIR: Wannan Water owned?

Mr GIBSON: No, DELWP, so the department of land, water and planning own and manage that piece of land.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Mr GIBSON: Sorry, now I understand your question. Yes.

The CHAIR: So Wannon Water or whatever the water authority was of the day back then, they would have established the site for nightsoil, yes?

Mr FOWLES: Well, probably not, because if there was no sewer, there was no—

Mr GIBSON: There was no sewer, so the Port Fairy sewer authority was developed at some point in time and they installed sewerage throughout the town, and once that was—

Mr FOWLES: But prior to then it was a State or municipal responsibility to actually—

Mr GIBSON: And the nightsoil man would come around and yes—

Ms GREEN: I would be really interested to know—you are saying State Government, but in terms of the legal successor entities I think that that would be really important to know.

Mr GIBSON: So the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning have assumed responsibility for that piece of land.

The CHAIR: They have acknowledged that? Okay.

Ms GREEN: Yes, okay.

Mr GIBSON: So in terms of what they have done, they have constructed what we call wattle and wire fences in the front below the dune face—

Mr FOWLES: To hold back asbestos.

Mr GIBSON: No, no, no—to catch the sand.

Mr FOWLES: Oh, right.

Mr GIBSON: Yes, so the asbestos is buried. It is under the sand. It is all buried.

Mr FOWLES: Sure, but it ought to be contained in a safe way.

Mr GIBSON: So it is—

Mr FOWLES: If it is making its way into the open environment, that is a problem.

Mr GIBSON: That is the problem. So what these wattle and wire fences do is they slow the water as it passes through. The water drops the sand, and the sand builds up around the fence. What they have done is they have actually now got three fences there in front of that site, and you cannot see any of them. They are totally buried.

Mr FOWLES: So it has worked?

Mr GIBSON: It has worked very well to this point, and given where it is located—it is slightly more sheltered in terms of where the waves come from and Griffiths Island—there is a fair probability that they will continue to work for a period of time, yes.

Mr FOWLES: How big are we talking about, this nightsoil site, specifically?

Mr GIBSON: It is not huge.

Mr FOWLES: Order of magnitude? Two acres?

Mr GIBSON: Yes, something like that. Yes, so it is not huge.

Ms GREEN: That sounds big enough to me. Just subsequent to that, and I am not trying to get into a which-level-of-government argument, but you talked about grants programs you had been able to secure from State Government but that you are concerned about them into the future. Is there anything similar at a federal level? Keeping in mind this is a parliamentary committee, not a government committee. We will make recommendations, so if there is not something—if you want to suggest it. When we table our report, Government is required to respond within six months as to what they think.

Mr GIBSON: I have actually got three points here right at the top that we have not even got to yet.

Ms GREEN: Okay, sorry. We keep interrupting you.

Mr GIBSON: No, but it is great. At least you are hearing what you want to hear about. One of the points is the Federal Government's involvement in coastal management. Their support is fantastic when you have an incident, so when car parks get washed away or bridges get damaged.

Ms GREEN: So it is emergency response.

Mr GIBSON: The national disaster relief fund comes to the fore, and it is fantastic. The question is: is some of that money best spent in prevention rather than in the response phase? There are people who are probably better equipped to advise the Committee on the economics of preventive activities ahead of reactionary responses. But further to that, the funding comes with like-for-like requirements. So if your structure that was lost was made of timber and is going to wash away in the next storm, that is what you have to replace it with to get the funding. So there is no futureproofing built into that service provision or that funding provision that allows you to build a structure that might be more suited to a future environment—so higher sea levels, bigger storms, whatever. You have got to go and put the same thing back there, which in all likelihood—

Mr FOWLES: And so the criteria say exactly the same thing—it has to be absolutely like for like?

Mr GIBSON: Pretty much, yes. So upgrading it—

Ms GREEN: So that could be something that we might be able to recommend.

Mr GIBSON: That is one of my top three points that we really need to look at. I think McKillops Bridge, up in the Snowy River, is a great example. When they first built it, it washed away. They built it higher, and it washed away. Eventually they built it at a height where it has been in place now for a long period of time. They learn from the past, and they adjusted it accordingly. We have got to not just learn from the past; we have got to be looking to the future too with the sea level rise we need to expect and the storm levels that we need to be expecting. Perhaps we need to be replacing our assets to meet those standards and not just going back with what washed away last week.

The CHAIR: So maybe we need to make a recommendation around the disaster relief fund being amended to reflect the realities of climate change, so that could be bushfire, coastal inundation, storms—all of the various things. It is a COAG agreement, I think, if my memory serves me correctly. So it will not be an easy thing to implement, but it is a worthwhile suggestion.

Mr GIBSON: To get it on the table is a good start, isn't it?

Mr MORRIS: Have you spoken to Dan Tehan about that?

Mr GIBSON: I do not know. I certainly haven't.

Mr MORRIS: I mean, that would be an obvious place to start.

Mr GIBSON: Good place to start, yes.

Mr HAMER: I was just going to ask, on a completely different topic—and you might have a plan to bring it up in your presentation—we talked in the previous presentation about the potential opportunities in the region. I would particularly maybe like your thoughts on the energy mix and the energy available and how you see that progressing in the future for Moyne. Obviously there is a large wind component, but there is also offshore gas

reserves. I know that is not part of the renewable energy component. But there is, I suppose, a large energy resource in this area, and I was interested if you had any thoughts.

Mr GIBSON: It is not specifically within my scope of broader intelligence, but I can perhaps provide some broad overviews that may be of assistance. Most obviously in Moyne shire: there are wind farms. We have got quite a lot of energy generation occurring already and a lot more in the pipeline. In relation to one of the questions that I think you may have asked previously around wind generation, there is a building sense of angst to some extent.

Mr FOWLES: Is that anxiety about the built form, if you like, or is it about other things?

Mr GIBSON: I think largely the built form, and when is enough enough for one community to absorb the renewable energy requirements for the state? There is, as I said, already an extensive wind generation investment in Moyne shire. It was when Mount Fyans was first mooted that the Mortlake community responded. Basically their mantra is, 'Enough's enough'. Do they have to be surrounded by wind farms or can some other community start to share that load?

Mr FOWLES: How many turbines have you got in the municipality?

Mr GIBSON: I cannot tell you. Like I said, it is not my specific remit.

The CHAIR: Are wind farms a part of your rate base?

Mr GIBSON: Yes. They pay a levy or a fee to the council.

The CHAIR: Any idea how much rates wind farms contribute to the municipality?

Mr GIBSON: Not off the top of my head. I cannot help you, sorry. I would like to. It is not insignificant, though; I can tell you that much.

Mr FOWLES: Do you mind taking both of those on notice: the number of turbines and the contribution to local government and perhaps if there is any other economic modelling. Because it is good for us to understand that the impacts of these projects—positive and negative—are real.

Mr GIBSON: Certainly. I had better write a big note on that so I do not forget.

Mr HAMER: This again might be not quite within your area, but to what extent is the council, and there may be other industries and properties within the council, actually tapping into that network, or is it all pretty much just for statewide generation—going into the grid and then distributing it?

Mr GIBSON: It just goes back into the grid, and then anyone will purchase it as green energy—or however the system works. What I will reiterate is, following on from the previous presentation, the concerns around the duplication of the distribution network. Currently different service providers, generators and distributors are not sharing infrastructure to transmit power back to substations or whatever they need to do. They will go and install their own set of lines.

Ms GREEN: Is that for technical or for competitive reasons?

Mr GIBSON: I do not exactly know why; they just do not seem to have any sharing arrangements in place between the companies where they will cooperate.

Ms GREEN: I know in the outer suburbs of Melbourne there have been some technical issues, so you might be interested to know.

Mr GIBSON: And it can depend. Like if the first one puts in a power pole that is incapable of taking a certain number of lines, then there is a limited ability for anyone else to then attach their lines to it. But we need to look at the futureproofing of whatever infrastructure goes in. I suppose the example is a subdivision. If you build a subdivision, you might have to put pipes in that are big enough to deal with the subdivision that comes in beyond you down the track. That sort of futureproofing approach needs to be taken into consideration.

The CHAIR: In terms of wind farms, you are absolutely right. You have had a lot of farms constructed, and there are a lot more to come. Obviously there is a lot of civil work associated with the construction of wind farms—there are a lot of concreters required, a lot of ground works—that is obviously employing a large number of people. What sort of economic impact has the construction of wind farms had? How many jobs are associated with the construction of farms? I know there are not necessarily a great deal once they are constructed, but that construction phase obviously provides a pretty significant injection of pretty well paid jobs into the economy. Do you want to give us a bit of a sense about that?

Mr GIBSON: I cannot give you a dollar sense or numbers, but what I will say is because all these wind farms happen around Mortlake, it certainly makes a massive contribution to the economic state of Mortlake. All of a sudden all the houses have now got rentals in them, the caravan park has got tenants in it and they are all eating and consuming and purchasing, so the flow-on effects of it I would not understate. It is a considerable thing for a small community like Mortlake to have that investment or that economic influx. But at the same time that community would be balancing that against the visual impact of literally being surrounded by wind towers. As you said before, there are the pros and cons, and it is the balance.

The CHAIR: Keep going if you have not—

Mr GIBSON: Mr Chair, I am conscious that I am at your beck and call.

The CHAIR: If there are any particular points that you have not made that you feel might be beneficial to us, please take the time to make them.

Mr GIBSON: I think inadvertently we have managed to cover most of it. I suppose the only other point I would make is current government policy around asset protection and coastal management is still fairly constrained and not opening itself up to the new order of sea level rise and the fact that defensive structures may be a part of the future going forward and the ability to get the approvals to install those structures on the coastline. I know that as part of that \$1.5 million I referred to earlier to try and better address both the nightsoil site and the Moyne shire landfill, the recommendation that came out of the report that was provided to the Committee in our submission was that an upgraded or an improved seawall is the best long- to medium-term option for those sites. I understand that there was a fair bit of debate from within the department about putting a rock wall in front of their nightsoil site. Was that really within policy or not? It probably is not, but when you weigh up the risks of having all that junk flow into the ocean, they have probably had to not necessarily strictly comply with the policy in order to facilitate that rock wall. So I think we need to have a look at whether the policies as they stand at the moment are really forward-looking or are a bit retrospective in terms of how the world was rather than how it is going to be.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask one last question?

Mr MORRIS: Sorry, can I just follow up on that?

The CHAIR: Sure.

Mr MORRIS: A reading of the current policy and the new policy, which is pretty much an updated version with a few minor changes, suggests it is not really getting in the way of permitting those structures. It seems to me it is more about the culture in the department rather than the actual policy.

Mr GIBSON: Possibly. Nothing further to add.

Mr MORRIS: I am not going to ask you to go further, but I think that is—

Mr GIBSON: Parliamentary privilege—

Mr MORRIS: Well, you have got to work with them, so I understand.

The CHAIR: So on page 5, and I had forgotten about this, you obviously have a working port.

Mr GIBSON: Yes.

The CHAIR: Just looking at that, there are a lot of publicly owned assets there. Who controls that port? Is it council the committee of management, is it Parks Victoria, is it your catchment management authority, is it a real mixed bag?

Ms GREEN: Along Moyne, you are specifically saying? Along the Moyne River?

The CHAIR: Well, whatever this harbour is.

Ms GREEN: Yes, that is the Moyne River.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr GIBSON: So it is a State Government asset. It is a local port, and Moyne shire is the committee of management for the port of Port Fairy.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Mr GIBSON: And it is an element that at some point we need to engage with the Department of Transport and start thinking about how the future of the port is going to look with sea level rise. There is no point having jetties underwater.

The CHAIR: Well, that is what I was going to ask. So a metre's sea level rise is going to put a significant number of the assets we see in this picture under threat. Is there any management plan around that? Is it work yet to be done?

Mr GIBSON: It is work yet to be done. So there is a whole lot of asset management work that is currently being undertaken at the port, mainly around assessment of the situation of the state of the assets and what repairs they need to do their job here and now. But also it is the beginning of a master planning process for the port, which will inevitably have to consider climate change impacts on how the port is going to function into the future. Your point about a metre sea level rise is an interesting one because it can be often difficult to visualise what that means. I always say to people high tide now is the low tide of the future, and then you look at where high tides are and you go, 'Jeez, that's low tide'. Again I refer you back to the picture on page 9—

The CHAIR: It can be a metre sea level rise and then a storm surge on top of that.

Mr GIBSON: And then you throw a storm surge on top of that. So you are sort of looking at those pictures on page 9 being potentially every day of the year.

Sand renourishment has been the other avenue of, I suppose, management that has been explored by Moyne shire in terms of managing East Beach, (a) to provide better protection to the rock wall, which then protects the assets behind it, but also as a tourist feature—there is no beach with no beach. So sand renourishment has been looked at seriously. The problem is it is not cheap, and there is also that element of risk that says, well, you could go and put \$2 million worth of sand on that beach and it could get washed away tomorrow. What I would say to that is the beach renourishment that is funded by the State Government generally occurs within the confines of Port Phillip Bay. I am sure we have all seen the footage of Frankston beach or whatever that just gets pummelled and jetties and half the beach gets washed away. So where sand nourishment does occur now has been demonstrated in recent times to be subject to large sand grabs. East Beach by its nature, facing east, is a little protected, so when people go 'We don't want to renourish an open beach', its orientation does protect it to some extent from those south-westerly swells.

Ms GREEN: So when you are saying renourishment, something like what has been done in Lady Bay in Warrnambool? Over the last 25 years all that revegetation—it is quite different from when my old man was the secretary of the foreshore trust, but it is quite—

Mr GIBSON: Lady Bay seems to be a point of accumulation whereas East Beach is a point of erosion. There will be a couple of factors in that. One is the training wall stops the migration of sand from further south-west onto East Beach, but then also you add in sea level rise and changes in dynamics there. It is going to further exacerbate that erosion.

Ms GREEN: So that sort of approach is not going to work.

Mr GIBSON: Having more sand on the beach does provide that buffer and prevents the water from taking it all, but again it is a costly exercise. One option is to dredge from further out in the bay, and that is basically a \$2 million job. But, having said that, having a statewide approach to it—and I know Gippsland Ports have got the *Tommy Norton*, which is the perfect vessel for the job. How we can make better access to those sorts of resources across the state is a consideration.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Robert. I am conscious of the time. Thank you for coming and presenting. Your presentation was very informative.

Ms GREEN: And you have cheered me up. I have spent 25 years regretting not buying a block of land in Crowe Street, Port Fairy, just back from Ocean Drive. This is the first day I have actually spent not regretting that purchase.

Mr GIBSON: You could have almost been one of my neighbours if you had.

Ms GREEN: On the upside, when I do retire here, the weather will be like the Gold Coast minus the cyclones. You have got to be positive.

Mr GIBSON: One can only hope.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Robert.

Witness withdrew.